

VZCZCXYZ0003
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHDM #0025/01 0091327
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 091327Z JAN 07
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2759
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEHAM/AMEMBASSY AMMAN 6484
RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4266
RUEHEG/AMEMBASSY CAIRO 2871
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7441
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1488
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4829
RUEHJM/AMCONSUL JERUSALEM 1048
RHMFISS/HQ USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL//CCPA//
INFO RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 7171

UNCLAS DAMASCUS 000025

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
CENTCOM FOR CCPA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [KMDR](#) [PREL](#) [KPAO](#) [OPRC](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: Syria/Germany, Syria/Nigeria, Syria/Spain, Iraq, Lebanon,
Palestinian Territories (1/9)

1. Summary: Syrian papers on Jan. 9 reported that President Asad held talks on Jan. 8 with former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder focusing on current developments in Iraq, Lebanon and the occupied territories and prospects of economic cooperation between Syria and Germany, particularly on the level of investment companies in the two countries.

President Asad also received a message from Nigerian counterpart Olusegun Obasanjo on bilateral ties. According to a Syrian presidential statement, Nigerian Ambassador in Beirut Ali al-Siyouti handed the message to the Syrian president.

On Syrian-Spanish relations, papers reported that on January 8 Information Minister Bilal criticized US Middle East policies, which he said escalate problems in the region. Bilal made the criticism in a meeting with a delegation of the Spanish Communist Party, the official SANA news agency reported. "Syria is not against the American people, but it criticizes the U.S. administration's policies in the region which escalate problems in it," the minister was quoted as saying. The head of the delegation, Miguel Lawrence, also said that US policy in the Middle East "is wrong and witnesses a real dilemma." He underlined the important role of Syria in solving regional crisis, saying that there would not be a comprehensive and genuine peace in the Middle East without Syria, according to SANA.

Papers also featured President Mubarak's statement to the Middle East News Agency (MENA) on Jan. 8 stressing the credibility of Syria in working to achieve a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East. President Mubarak called on Israel to prove its seriousness over the resumption of the negotiations on the Syrian track and withdrawal from the occupied Syrian Golan.

All papers reported that on Jan. 8 Pope Benedict XVI condemned the Israeli war against Lebanon considering this war an example that reflects the failure of military solutions, noting that Lebanon's future depends on its people's unity and the fraternal relations connecting its different religious and social groups.

End of summary.

2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews with former German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder the general situation in the region and economic cooperation with Germany and receives a message from the Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo on bilateral relations and a follow-up on the outcome of President Obasanjo's recent visit to Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen,

"Information Minister Bilal discusses regional developments with the British-European Parliamentary delegation. Bilal reviews Syrian-Spanish relations and the situation in the Middle East with a delegation of the Spanish Communist Party in Catalonia" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/9)

"President Mubarak calls on Israel to prove its seriousness over the resumption of negotiations on the Syrian track and withdrawal from occupied Golan" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/9)

"The Lebanese opposition escalates anti-government protest. Speaker of Lebanese Parliament Nabih Berri accuses French Ambassador and Jumblatt of blocking his initiative to solve the current Lebanese crisis" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 1/9)

"Hamass calls on Fatah leaders for dialogue. An Israeli move to expel Palestinians from the West Bank to neighboring countries" (Government-owned Tishreen, 1/9)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Care of the International Community"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (1/9): "News reports from Iraq revealed that an American unit in Iraq stopped a taxi and killed its five occupants in front of eyewitnesses, although they were not armed or wanted.... Crimes and massacres committed by the occupation forces in Iraq are worse than those committed by the Nazis....
"Although the United States will always try to justify such actions as self-defense or isolated cases, they remain, in the eyes of international law, war crimes and crimes against humanity.... Since international law considers the occupying power to be responsible for the security and lives of the inhabitants in the areas under occupation, the US Administration, represented by President George Bush, the Pentagon leadership, and the officers and soldiers involved in these crimes bear the responsibility under international law and must, therefore, be referred to the competent international court....

"International judicial and human right organizations must set up an international tribunal to examine US war crimes in Iraq and try those involved in them in order to serve international justice and guarantee the rights of the victims of these crimes, and in order that the crimes not go unpunished."

"US Failure in Iraq"

Khalid al-Ashhab, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (1/9): "The Bush administration failed to transfer and settle democracy in Iraq and turn it into a model for the Arab region to emulate. But it succeeded, with distinction, in destroying the foundations of Iraq's security and stability and in pushing Iraq toward devastating strife and turning it into an endless series of mass graves and random killings around the clock....

"The Bush administration failed to reconstruct and develop Iraq and turn it into a spot radiating civilization and science, but it outstandingly succeeded in returning the country to the medieval ages and in rendering it void of awareness, culture, and even

history, exactly as Donald Rumsfeld promised on the eve of Iraq's occupation....

"The Bush administration also succeeded in breeding whirlpools of killing, repression, and despotism in Iraq and turning the country into a bogeyman frightening others from the poisoned American honey."

"Israel, a Threat to the Whole Arab Nation"

Salim Abbud, a political analyst in government-owned Al-Thawra, said (1/9): "Those who argue that the conflict with Israel concerns Palestinians alone and that Israel is not a threat to other Arab countries are tampering with the facts of the Arab-Israeli conflict and with the future and existence of Palestinians and the entire Arab nation....

"Arab peace advocates must realize that the state of conflict will continue, even if its management requires means and ways -- other than war -- to fit with certain situations. They must realize that Israel in particular is a threat to individual and pan-Arab security, and that the organic link between the security of every Arab country and the destiny of the Palestinian cause will remain because the conflict, in its essence, is an Arab-Israeli conflict. Dealing with HAMAS as if it were a tool for blowing up the situation in the region because of its refusal to recognize Israel and blaming it for the current situation in the Palestinian territories -- just as blaming the Lebanese resistance for the current situation in

Lebanon -- reflect not only a erroneous political calculation, but also a shortsightedness that might lead to positions that do not ultimately serve the interests of Arabs and Palestinians, and that help Israelis and US neoconservatives realize their objectives...."

Roebuck